



A CUP OF HEALTH WITH CDC

Older Eyes

Healthy Vision Month — May 2016

Recorded: May 3, 2016; posted: May 5, 2016

[Announcer] This program is presented by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

[Dr. Gaynes] Welcome to *A Cup of Health with CDC*, a weekly feature of the *MMWR*, the Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report. I'm your host, Dr. Robert Gaynes.

As we grow older, our vision sometimes isn't as clear as it used to be. As a result, older adults are at increased risk for falling.

Dr. John Crews is a researcher with CDC's National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion. He's joining us today to discuss the importance of regular eye exams. Welcome to the show, John.

[Dr. Crews] Thank you very much, Bob.

[Dr. Gaynes] John, let's start with how many older adults suffer from some degree of vision impairment?

[Dr. Crews] Well, there are probably about 20 million Americans who report some vision problems, but there's an estimated 3.2 million older people, meaning people over age 65, who report seriously difficulty seeing or are blind.

[Dr. Gaynes] What are the consequences of vision impairment in the older population?

[Dr. Crews] Well, I think the most dreaded experience for older people is the time they have to give up driving. But other things like no longer being able to read newspapers and books also threaten their independence. But one thing we know is that almost half of people over the age of 65 with vision impairment fall in any given year. And falls are not benign. People fall and break their hip or they hit their head on a counter.

[Dr. Gaynes] How often should we have our eyes checked?

[Dr. Crews] Well that largely depends on how old you are and the circumstances that you have, but people who have diabetes should certainly get their eyes examined every year. People with a family history of glaucoma should have an annual eye exam. And if you have any eye problems, like pain, blurring, visual distortions, difficulty driving or reading, it's just a good idea to get a comprehensive eye exam. For people who don't have those kinds of circumstances, having your eyes examined every two years is a good idea.

[Dr. Gaynes] Are older adults getting their eyes checked as often as recommended?

[Dr. Crews] No they're not and there are a number of reasons for that, but one is that older people believe that vision loss is a normal part of aging and it's not. People should go to an eye care provider—an optometrist or an ophthalmologist in their community and have a comprehensive eye exam.

[Dr. Gaynes] Many older adults with vision problems live alone. What are some suggestions for making their environment safer?

[Dr. Crews] Well, there's at least three reasonable safeguards, I think, that older people can take. One is that, generally, the more light, the better, especially in basement stairways or outside steps or any transition. So good light but avoid glare. A second is to remove trip hazards like throw rugs, children's toys, or just clutter that's on the floor. And the third is to clean up spills right away, especially in the kitchen, because spills can contribute to slip hazards.

[Dr. Gaynes] Where can listeners get more information about vision impairment?

[Dr. Crews] They can go to CDC.gov/visionhealth, all one word.

[Dr. Gaynes] Thanks, John. I've been talking today with CDC's Dr. John Crews about the importance of regular eye exams, especially among older adults. Early detection and treatment of eye disease is important to either treat or slow the progression of vision impairment. Older adults should have their eyes examined regularly by an eye-care professional.

Until next time, be well. This is Dr. Robert Gaynes for A Cup of Health with CDC.

[Announcer] For the most accurate health information, visit www.cdc.gov or call 1-800-CDC-INFO.